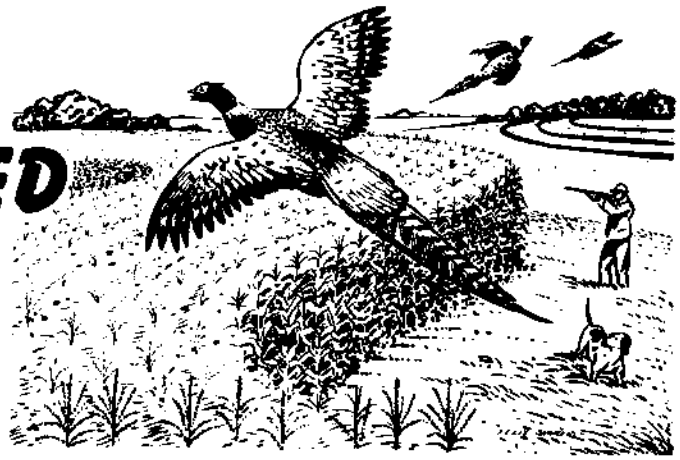
Habitat management for

RING-NECKED PHEASANTS



In The State of Washington

The ring-necked pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*, (also called "Chink" or Chinese pheasant), is an introduced bird which has become the most important small game species in the State. Annual harvest of pheasants in Washington often exceeds a half million birds.

Pheasants are found in most of the nonforested areas of the State, with the largest populations east of the Cascades. They are almost always associated with agriculture, and are rarely found in numbers where cereal grains are not included in the crop rotation.

Nesting usually begins in mid-April. The average clutch size is eleven eggs, and the incubation period is 24 days. If the nest is destroyed before hatching, the hen will usually renest, laying fewer eggs. Thus, most hens manage to bring off a brood.

Survival of chicks often is low, especially among early-hatched broods which may be chilled by cold rains. Though later broods are smaller, they have a better chance of success. Four to five surviving chicks per hen usually assure a successful hunting season.

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HABITAT NEEDS

Food. Cereal grains--barley, corn, proso millet, grain sorghums, and wheat--make up over 80 percent of the pheasant's diet. Seeds of knotweed, pigweed, *Psoralea*, ricegrass, Russianthistle, and sunflower are also eaten. Fruits--hawthorn, rose, Russianolive, and snowberry--are not preferred but may sustain birds through periods of deep snow when other foods are scarce. Pheasant chicks live almost wholly on insects for the first few weeks; and the adult diet is about 15 percent insects --ants, beetles, caterpillars, and grasshoppers--in the summer and fall.

Cover. Pheasants need adequate cover for nesting, roosting, escape from enemies, and protection from extremes of weather. In some intensively-farmed areas, cover is so scarce that they cannot survive, even with plenty of food. Alfalfa and short grasses which have a rapid spring growth are good nesting cover. Cattails, bulrushes, giant wildrye, tall wheatgrass, sagebrush, bitterbrush, and brushy thickets provide protection from cold-winds, summer heat, predators, and hunters. Alfalfa, grain stubble, tall grasses and sedges allow a quick get away and provide good roosting cover.

Water. Pheasants drink water, and the best populations are found where there is an adequate supply.

LAND MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS

1. Protect grass nesting-cover on ditchbanks, field borders, waterways, odd areas, and around ponds. Cover is needed near hay fields to assure successful renesting after the first cutting of hay.

2. Protect cover areas such as brushy fence rows and waterways, cattail marshes, ryegrass flats, and weed patches. If cattails and weeds must be burned, it should be done in spring before nesting begins, but after the danger of winter storms has passed.

3. It is important that food, cover, and water be developed close together, so the birds will not have to travel far to fulfill their daily requirements. If these components are as far as 1/4 to 1/2 mile apart, there should be travel lanes connecting them. Provide the "travel lanes" for birds to move between cover, food, and water sources by protecting fence rows, waterways, etc.

4. Grow cereal grains adjacent to good cover.

5. Leave patches of unharvested grain near good winter cover.

6. Establish windbreaks and hedgerows around crop fields and feedlots for cover and travel lanes.

7. Provide drinking water near to food and cover. This can be done by means of farm ponds, spring development, or by constructing self-filling watering devices.